

The Meaning of Generous Giving

After his book “*40-Day Spiritual Journey to a More Generous Life*” became an unexpected bestseller, Brian Kluth was contacted by NBC to do a TV news story. When the TV reporter interviewed him, she asked, “So, you think God wants everyone rich?” To which Brian responded, “No, I don’t believe that.” She was a little surprised by the answer and then asked Mr. Kluth, “Well, what do you believe?” Brian answered, “**I believe that everyone needs to learn to become more generous with whatever God has given them.**” Then the reporter asked, “Well, didn’t your book becoming a bestseller make you rich?” He replied, “No, it helped me become more generous!”

The truth is—each of us needs to learn how to become more generous with whatever God entrusts to us. Now, the questions for us this morning are: **What is generosity? What does it mean to give generously?**

Many times when we think about *generous giving* we think about amounts. I have been told in the past “So & So” gave a “generous” donation. Later I have found out that the meaning behind such an expression is that “So & So” made a large financial contribution. This has happened to me several times, which has led me to think that the word “generous” has become synonymous with material abundance, ample proportions. Although large donations can be signs of generous giving, such contributions do not define what generous giving is all about.

I think that linking generous giving with large donations is in many ways a problem, and this problem has been going on for a very long time. This is not a 21st century issue; it is not even an American issue. For centuries, our human nature has been tempted to put a monetary value or size to (or behind) the meaning of generous giving.

Right before the offertory, we read the story when Jesus was in the temple putting his accounting skills to work. The Bible says, “*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions.”* **Mark 12:41-43 NLT**

If you were able to ask Jesus who was the most generous giver that day in the temple, what do you think his answer would be? Let me ask you the question in a more personal way: who do you think is the most generous giver in this story? I have no doubts that the widow is the most generous person in this story.

There is another story in the Bible among many others that relates to giving. It is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The Book of Acts tells that these folks owned a property and they sold it to make a contribution to the newborn Christian movement, the church. Let me go to the text and let me ask you to follow the reading.

But there was a man named Ananias, who with his wife Sapphira sold some property that belonged to them. But with his wife's agreement he kept part of the money for himself and turned the rest over to the apostles.

Peter said to him, "Ananias, why did you let Satan take control of you and make you lie to the Holy Spirit by keeping part of the money you received for the property? Before you sold the property, it belonged to you; and after you sold it, the money was yours. Why, then, did you decide to do such a thing? You have not lied to people—you have lied to God!" As soon as Ananias heard this, he fell down dead; and all who heard about it were terrified. The young men came in, wrapped up his body, carried him out, and buried him.

About three hours later his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in. Peter asked her, "Tell me, was this the full amount you and your husband received for your property?"

"Yes," she answered, "the full amount."

So Peter said to her, "Why did you and your husband decide to put the Lord's Spirit to the test? The men who buried your husband are at the door right now, and they will carry you out too!" At once she fell down at his feet and died. The young men came in and saw that she was dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Acts 5:1-10 GNT

Here we have a difficult story to look at. I have heard people saying that the Lord struck Ananias and Sapphira with death because they were lying to God. I don't see this affirmation being made in the text we just read. Personally, I do not side with that specific interpretation. I would love to have a definite answer to explain the death of these folks, but I don't. However, I like to think that both Ananias and Sapphira were so embarrassed (ashamed), that they had a heart attack or the like when they were confronted with their deception. Perhaps they died from shock or guilt.

Without focusing too much on the cause(es) of their death, we can draw a valuable lesson from the story. Perhaps, Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be perceived as generous givers, and they wanted to use deception to accomplish their goal. The amount of money they gave was not the cause of their death; deception was the cause of their death. Dear church, deception leads to death. By trying to deceive God and others, we are actually deceiving and putting ourselves in an unhealthy position that can be very dangerous to both our physical and spiritual well-being.

From the accounts we looked at, we learn that **generosity is proportionate to one's resources**. We should give of what we have. The question is: Are we giving all we can? **Generous giving is not about quantity; rather, it is about how much of ourselves we are giving, investing.**

Here is where I want to look at our Scripture lesson for the day. Jesus fed more than five thousand people because of the generous contribution of a boy who had only five loaves of bread and two fish. This is one of the stories in Jesus's ministry where we have an anonymous hero, a little boy who did not even think how insignificant his contribution might have seemed; instead, he offered in humility all he had.

I want you to notice something in the story that many times we overlook, and it helps us to see the meaning of generous giving. **I don't think that the small meal was offered based on the**

need of the people. Imagine what could have happened if the boy would have considered the proportion of his contribution. When we start reasoning about the kind of impact our giving may have, we can easily get discouraged.

One thing I want you to consider. **Generous giving is not (cannot be) based *only* on the needs of others.**

When the needs are great, and our resources are limited, we can be tempted to think that our contributions will not make a difference. As a result, we can end up with a tight fist instead of an open hand. Studies show that when people are overwhelmed by the needs presented to them, they are less likely to give. On the flipside, generous giving cannot be based only on needs because when the opposite is true, when our resources are greater than the needs, we can be tempted to give only to meet the need instead of giving as much as we can. What I am trying to say dear friends is that giving cannot be based only on perceived needs.

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as the king passed by. The Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, “Sir, copper coins would sufficiently meet a beggar’s need. Why give him gold?” Alexander responded in royal fashion, “Copper coins would suit the beggar’s need, but gold coins suit Alexander’s giving.”

Oswald Sanders writes, “This is... the new mathematics, the arithmetic of heaven. God estimates our gifts not so much by their financial value, as by the sacrifice involved, the love that accompanies it...” (Oswald Sanders, *Enjoying Intimacy With God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 155.). **Generous giving is not about quantity; rather, it is about how much of ourselves we are giving, investing.**

One of the points in the story of *The Supernatural Feeding* that I love is that the name of the kid is not mentioned. Perhaps, this is an invitation for us to fill in the blank with our names. Perhaps, this is an indication that you don’t need to have a big name or ample resources to give abundantly. **The only thing required for generous giving is a willing heart.**

Don’t ever think that what you can give is insignificant. Many Christians do not give because they think that what they can afford to give right now is so small it doesn’t matter. Remember this: when we give with all our might, with willing hearts, we are giving generously. When we give generously, God takes our gifts and multiplies them.

God increases your generous giving in supernatural ways. We need to always keep in mind that in God’s economy, five plus two does not equal seven. In God’s economy, five loaves of bread and two fish is not a snack. Instead, it is a banquet that satisfies multitudes and results in plenty of leftovers.

Can you and I be generous givers? Of course, we can. Every time we invest ourselves in our giving we are generous givers.

I want to finish with a quote of Mother Teresa who wrote, “It’s not how much we give but how much love (and I would add sacrifice) we put into giving.”